

Ep 33: Kaja Bryx, Catholic nationalism in Poland

<https://www.secularism.org.uk/podcast/2020/09/ep-33-kaja-bryx-catholic-nationalism-in-poland>

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Welcome to Episode 33 of the National Secular Society podcast hosted by Emma

0:00:15.360,0:00:18.240

Park (EP).

This episode is about secularism in

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Poland. Historically

Poland has long been a Catholic country.

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Catholicism was suppressed under the Soviet occupation

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from the end of World War II until the fall of the Berlin Wall.

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Since then, however, a new agreement with the Vatican has resulted in a greater

0:00:32.640,0:00:37.200

promotion of Catholic interests.

At the same time, Poland has a basically

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secular constitution

and public support for the Catholic

0:00:40.559,0:00:45.120

church itself has waned considerably in the wake of the child abuse scandal.

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Nonetheless Poland continues to have restrictive laws about women's

0:00:48.800,0:00:53.199

reproductive rights.

LGBT rights are also under threat but how

0:00:53.199,0:00:56.399

much public support is there for free access to abortion?

0:00:56.399,0:01:00.160

What about the teaching of LGBT identities in schools?

0:01:00.160,0:01:04.799

Is the trend in Poland towards greater conservatism or greater liberalism?

0:01:04.799,0:01:08.720

To answer these questions and more I will be speaking to Kaja Bryx, President

0:01:08.720,0:01:13.200

of the Polish Rationalist Association, a national organisation, which promotes

0:01:13.200,0:01:16.960

free thought, tolerance and science-based knowledge. I will then

0:01:16.960,0:01:21.200

be joined by Aleksandra Myslek, a member of the NSS Council for further

0:01:21.200,0:01:24.880

reflection.

Aleks is also a professional pianist and

0:01:24.880,0:01:27.360

has recorded the music accompanying this episode,

0:01:27.360,0:01:35.379

about which more later.

0:01:36.960,0:01:41.200

I'm joined now by Kaya Bryx, who is President of the Polish Rationalist

0:01:41.200,0:01:44.960

Association.

Kaya, thank you so much for joining us

0:01:44.960,0:01:50.640

today. (KB): Thank you for the invitation. (EP): How secular would you say Poland's

0:01:50.640,0:01:55.200

constitution is as a matter of law and what is the the relationship between

0:01:55.200,0:02:00.159

the Church and the State in Poland? (KB): Well we do have definitely a

0:02:00.159,0:02:03.680

separation of the State and the churches but we

0:02:03.680,0:02:07.680

definitely don't have the secularism model like the

0:02:07.680,0:02:11.760

French Laissez Faire because according to our

0:02:11.760,0:02:15.440

constitution the public authorities remain

0:02:15.440,0:02:18.319

impartial in the matters related to religious

0:02:18.319,0:02:22.319

or philosophical beliefs but at the same time

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they ensure everyone's freedom to express their beliefs

0:02:26.319,0:02:31.440

in public. So well we definitely have secularism here.

0:02:31.440,0:02:38.160

The problem is that at the same time the constitution mentions that the

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agreements that the Polish State will have with different religious

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associations will determine the rules of these

0:02:47.280,0:02:51.840

associations. The constitution mentions that rules

0:02:51.840,0:02:56.720

will be as per the agreements between the state and each religious association

0:02:56.720,0:03:02.159

and it mentions that the Catholic church has a special agreement with the Polish

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State which is the Concorde which was signed in 1993 and ratified in 1998

0:03:08.400,0:03:12.480

and this international agreement which we have with the Holy See

0:03:12.480,0:03:16.239

well give lots of privileges to the Catholic church.

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And today actually for many years now we've been discussing in Poland that it

0:03:21.519,0:03:25.680

would be great to change these rules because

0:03:25.680,0:03:29.360
they are
not in line with secularism

0:03:29.360,0:03:32.720
as we would like to see it. But in order
to

0:03:32.720,0:03:36.640
change the agreements with the
Catholic church we would have to first

0:03:36.640,0:03:41.599
change the constitution. (EP):
What are these special privileges? Can

0:03:41.599,0:03:45.280
you give an example of some of the
privileges which the Catholic church has

0:03:45.280,0:03:49.280
in Poland at the moment. (KB): Well they
have lots of economical

0:03:49.280,0:03:53.519
privileges.
They don't pay taxes,

0:03:53.519,0:04:00.080
they have received
lands that have been taken from them

0:04:00.080,0:04:05.200
in 1950 when basically all properties
were nationalised

0:04:05.200,0:04:09.200
and at the same time a special Church
Fund was created

0:04:09.200,0:04:12.840
as a compensation for the church. So
after

0:04:12.840,0:04:18.720
1989 there was this special
commission, property commission, that was

0:04:18.720,0:04:21.600
giving back
the properties of different religious

0:04:21.600,0:04:26.880
associations which in principle
was a very good thing. But the problem

0:04:26.880,0:04:30.880
was that it was
very corrupted and that the Catholic

0:04:30.880,0:04:35.520
church
received lots of properties

0:04:35.520,0:04:38.960
with fake values which later they were
reselling

0:04:38.960,0:04:44.320
at a triple price and they
made a lot of money out of it. This

0:04:44.320,0:04:48.880
commission was
circa 2011 and members of this

0:04:48.880,0:04:53.840
commission are now being prosecuted
for corruption. But the Catholic church

0:04:53.840,0:04:57.280
is not prosecuted in any way so they
have lots of properties,

0:04:57.280,0:05:00.960
they have lots of rights when it comes
to

0:05:00.960,0:05:04.639
charity organisations that they don't
need to fulfill the

0:05:04.639,0:05:10.000
the usual criteria, and at the same time
the Church Fund which was created

0:05:10.000,0:05:15.120
as a compensation for the lost
properties in 1950 is still in place.

0:05:15.120,0:05:18.479
So the State is still paying for this
fund

0:05:18.479,0:05:23.120
which covers social insurance and health
insurance of the priests.

0:05:23.120,0:05:26.800
The problem with this commission, the
biggest problem was, that there was no

0:05:26.800,0:05:31.120
appeal.
So a small group of people just decided

0:05:31.120,0:05:34.400
that
this hospital or this school or this

0:05:34.400,0:05:38.000
cinema
once belonged to the Catholic church and

0:05:38.000,0:05:43.199
sometimes they actually went
back to some documents from 14th century

0:05:43.199,0:05:46.960
and they decided that okay in the 14th
century this belongs to the Catholic

0:05:46.960,0:05:51.120
church so now it should be
given back to them and there was no way

0:05:51.120,0:05:54.800
to stop it,
and no way to appeal. (EP): So it's a large

0:05:54.800,0:05:59.280
potential
for corruption then but you say that

0:05:59.280,0:06:03.360
there's been a movement to discuss

0:06:03.360,0:06:08.160
abolishing these special privileges.
What's the current situation? Because

0:06:08.160,0:06:11.520
recently of course the Law and
Justice Party

0:06:11.520,0:06:15.440
last autumn was elected for its second
term, the very conservative

0:06:15.440,0:06:20.560
Catholic party and is now the
governing party in a coalition

0:06:20.560,0:06:25.759
in Poland and President Andrei Duda
has just been elected for a

0:06:25.759,0:06:28.560
second term and he's
former member of the Law and Justice

0:06:28.560,0:06:33.440
Party. How is
their power affecting the

0:06:33.440,0:06:35.759
situation
of the Catholic church in Poland? Does

0:06:35.759,0:06:40.720
that mean that these reforms
are going to be on the back burner? Well

0:06:40.720,0:06:44.400
luckily
for us this government and this

0:06:44.400,0:06:48.240
President
they say lots of things which

0:06:48.240,0:06:51.520
usually are something you wouldn't like to hear.

0:06:51.520,0:06:54.720
But legally they haven't done many changes.

0:06:54.720,0:07:01.919
So either they are not capable of doing them or maybe they don't really

0:07:01.919,0:07:06.319
want to make them real as much as they like to

0:07:06.319,0:07:11.039
speak about these things. Definitely the climate has changed a lot

0:07:11.039,0:07:14.000
in Poland, in the sense that the church

0:07:14.000,0:07:18.160
is heard more. One of the first things that this

0:07:18.160,0:07:22.960
Government did was changing the role of the public

0:07:22.960,0:07:26.960
media which basically turned into a propaganda

0:07:26.960,0:07:30.720
tube of the Government. We actually used to have a problem with

0:07:30.720,0:07:35.759
that even before that it was always too much connected to the ruling party,

0:07:35.759,0:07:39.280
the public TV especially, but

0:07:39.280,0:07:43.759
since Law and Justice is in power they

have openly made it their propaganda

0:07:43.759,0:07:47.680
tube and they have given more time for the Catholic church

0:07:47.680,0:07:51.599
representatives. They have a lot of films, documents that

0:07:51.599,0:07:56.400
are supposed to teach Catholic values but actually

0:07:56.400,0:08:00.479
they do it, I mean having it as a propaganda tube this is

0:08:00.479,0:08:04.479
definitely not right, but the Christian values -

0:08:04.479,0:08:09.039
they are there in the rules for the public TV,

0:08:09.039,0:08:14.800
as decided in 2009: that the public TV should actually

0:08:14.800,0:08:17.599
support Christian values. It was decided by the

0:08:17.599,0:08:21.759
Parliament in 2009 when Civic Platform was

0:08:21.759,0:08:27.520
in power. (EP): Okay so it's been around for quite a long time but I mean

0:08:27.520,0:08:31.840
you say that this Government is is currently talking more than

0:08:31.840,0:08:35.360
it's acting. What is that in relation to

because

0:08:35.360,0:08:40.080

I mean it's certainly the case isn't it that they're very much opposed to

0:08:40.080,0:08:44.320

things like certain liberties like women's reproductive rights,

0:08:44.320,0:08:47.839

LGBT rights and they've sought to sort of

0:08:47.839,0:08:50.880

undermine the independence of the judiciary.

0:08:50.880,0:08:54.880

I mean how far has this had practical effects?

0:08:54.880,0:08:59.040

(KB): Will definitely the independence of the judiciary - this the most serious

0:08:59.040,0:09:02.880

issue.

They have changed the way the National

0:09:02.880,0:09:06.959

Council of the Judiciary works, so the council which nominates

0:09:06.959,0:09:11.519

judges.

And they have just terminated the

0:09:11.519,0:09:15.360

term of the current members of this council

0:09:15.360,0:09:19.040

and they appointed new ones. And ever since

0:09:19.040,0:09:22.399

this new Council, appointed by the

current parliament,

0:09:22.399,0:09:28.000

has been appointing new judges. At the same time they have introduced a Bill

0:09:28.000,0:09:34.800

which says that you cannot be a judge anymore once

0:09:34.800,0:09:39.920

you're 65 years old

which is quite absurd in this profession.

0:09:39.920,0:09:43.519

There are many many judges who actually

0:09:43.519,0:09:46.720

work

all around the world at their 70s and

0:09:46.720,0:09:51.120

80s and even

older because what matters is their

0:09:51.120,0:09:54.720

expertise.

So they are actually considered very

0:09:54.720,0:09:58.240

valuable. (EP):

Is the idea with reducing the age

0:09:58.240,0:10:02.079

limit to 65 that they will then be able

to replace judges more quickly with

0:10:02.079,0:10:06.640

their own

preferred candidates? (KB): Yes although as an

0:10:06.640,0:10:09.680

explanation from their side well they used

0:10:09.680,0:10:14.240

the argument that many of these elderly

judges

0:10:14.240,0:10:17.360
were actually related to the Communist regime

0:10:17.360,0:10:24.320
which we had pre-1989 in Poland and some of them actually, well were

0:10:24.320,0:10:28.760
responsible for
for what happened to the opposition for

0:10:28.760,0:10:33.680
incarcerations, even
for deaths of people. The problem

0:10:33.680,0:10:39.200
is that we don't know exactly
which of these judges were responsible.

0:10:39.200,0:10:42.399
But that was the argument
which

0:10:42.399,0:10:46.000
many Polish people accepted that yes,
these

0:10:46.000,0:10:50.240
people were related to that regime and
now they are still

0:10:50.240,0:10:55.680
judges and some of them actually
are criminals themselves. (EP):

0:10:55.680,0:10:59.360
It's a good sort of pretext
potentially.

0:10:59.360,0:11:02.720
(KB): Yes but but of course it meant that a
lot of judges

0:11:02.720,0:11:06.480
were now replaced with younger people

0:11:06.480,0:11:11.040
by the new Council. (EP): How far have these
reforms

0:11:11.040,0:11:14.320
in practice, how far have they meant that
it is

0:11:14.320,0:11:19.600
say more difficult for women to get
an abortion in Poland?

0:11:19.600,0:11:23.040
Have people who are LGBT found
themselves

0:11:23.040,0:11:27.279
more under pressure as a result of these
changes and as a result of the

0:11:27.279,0:11:31.200
current atmosphere in Poland? (KB): Let's talk
maybe about the

0:11:31.200,0:11:34.800
the abortion, the health and reproductive
rights first.

0:11:34.800,0:11:38.640
Because actually I think there is a
quite a big misconception

0:11:38.640,0:11:42.560
regarding this topic abroad. Because
this Government

0:11:42.560,0:11:49.360
has actually not done anything to
make the situation of women worse. We had

0:11:49.360,0:11:56.240
civic bills. This is very interesting. So
the project of these bills to

0:11:56.240,0:11:59.279
abolish abortion completely, they came
from

0:11:59.279,0:12:03.279

civil society. So Catholic organisations basically

0:12:03.279,0:12:07.279

who got enough signatories to submit these projects

0:12:07.279,0:12:11.200

to the Parliament. And there was this very very horrific

0:12:11.200,0:12:18.240

project which was submitted in 2017 that was to ban abortion completely.

0:12:18.240,0:12:24.560

And also there was this point about in case of miscarriage there should be

0:12:24.560,0:12:29.680

a prosecutor involved to investigate whether it was done on purpose or not

0:12:29.680,0:12:35.279

and there was a penalty of jail meant for women who would have done an

0:12:35.279,0:12:39.920

abortion.
So this was a really horrible Bill and

0:12:39.920,0:12:44.000

this is why we had these huge protests - Black Protests. I'm sure you've heard

0:12:44.000,0:12:47.120

about them?
(EP): Yes, and it was successful in

0:12:47.120,0:12:50.079

overturning,
preventing that Bill from coming into

0:12:50.079,0:12:54.800

law. (KB): Yes and luckily this Bill was rejected by the Parliament.

0:12:54.800,0:12:56.959

(EP): Do you think there's a possibility that such a Bill might

0:12:56.959,0:13:00.399

be raised again and be passed successfully and then ...

0:13:00.399,0:13:04.480

(KB): There is another project done by the same organisation

0:13:04.480,0:13:07.680

which has been submitted to the Parliament recently

0:13:07.680,0:13:10.880

but this project is very different, luckily.

0:13:10.880,0:13:14.320

I mean it's still not good and I hope they will reject it again.

0:13:14.320,0:13:17.600

For now it's been moved to the Commissions

0:13:17.600,0:13:21.120

where it may remain for a few years in fact

0:13:21.120,0:13:27.600

before the parliament decides on it. So at the moment we still have the same

0:13:27.600,0:13:31.160

law about the reproductive rights which we have since

0:13:31.160,0:13:37.440

1993 which says that in general abortion is illegal but there are three

0:13:37.440,0:13:40.800

exceptions
which are accepted and that's in case a

0:13:40.800,0:13:45.760

woman's life is endangered or there is severe fetus

0:13:45.760,0:13:52.480

disease, genetic disorder or in case of rape. (EP): So it's still pretty restrictive

0:13:52.480,0:13:56.399

but I mean what what is the organisation which is trying to

0:13:56.399,0:14:00.720

put forward an even more restrictive Bill? (EP): The organisation's name is Ordo

0:14:00.720,0:14:04.399

luris. (EP): Oh it's Ordo luris, okay right so the

0:14:04.399,0:14:08.000

very traditional Catholic, conservative

0:14:08.000,0:14:11.360

organisation. (KB): Yes but there are a few more,

0:14:11.360,0:14:16.399

similar organisations in Poland. So they actually joined forces for these

0:14:16.399,0:14:21.760

projects. (EP): And is the same thing, do they still now are they still pushing in

0:14:21.760,0:14:24.880

this new Bill would it be for an another effective completed

0:14:24.880,0:14:28.079

ban on abortion? (KB): They have given up for now

0:14:28.079,0:14:33.279

on pushing for a total ban on abortion which clearly shows that actually the

0:14:33.279,0:14:38.320

political climate is not to ban it completely. I still hope

0:14:38.320,0:14:41.680

that this project will be rejected as

0:14:41.680,0:14:46.320

well. But we have managed to defend the

0:14:46.320,0:14:50.480

status quo for now, which is well not that bad.

0:14:50.480,0:14:54.399

But of course we can expect new projects as well in the future, I mean

0:14:54.399,0:14:58.000

this is a kind of fight that might continue

0:14:58.000,0:15:01.279

for decades. (EP): What is the Polish Rationalist

0:15:01.279,0:15:05.360

Association's stance on abortion, what would you like to see the law

0:15:05.360,0:15:12.959

becoming? (KB): Well we would like to see a free access to abortion. That's

0:15:12.959,0:15:17.440

what we believe would be the best - for a woman to choose freely

0:15:17.440,0:15:21.600

whether she would like to continue with the pregnancy or not.

0:15:21.600,0:15:25.519

(EP): How much support does that view have in Poland at the moment?

0:15:25.519,0:15:29.199
(KB): I would say not much. I was there at the Black Protests

0:15:29.199,0:15:33.920
and I interviewed lots of people at the time because I was interested

0:15:33.920,0:15:37.040
in knowing their opinions . So I did a poll

0:15:37.040,0:15:40.160
about whether these people who are protesting

0:15:40.160,0:15:45.279
against the the abortion ban, would they like to have a free access to abortion

0:15:45.279,0:15:48.959
in all cases,
or whether they would prefer to

0:15:48.959,0:15:53.759
remain with
what we have right now. And well 90%

0:15:53.759,0:15:58.160
of these women who were protesting actually preferred the current status

0:15:58.160,0:16:00.560
quo. (EP): How high a proportion of the population

0:16:00.560,0:16:05.680
is Catholic?
(KB): It's hard to say. Well officially

0:16:05.680,0:16:10.639
it's 93% but
here we are talking about people who are

0:16:10.639,0:16:15.759
baptised and
in fact when we look at the statistics

0:16:15.759,0:16:19.279
that
the Catholic church does about 40%

0:16:19.279,0:16:24.959
of these people go to the Sunday Mass. (EP): So there is this big gap there.

0:16:24.959,0:16:28.160
(KB): Yesh so we would say that most people in Poland

0:16:28.160,0:16:31.759
are baptised and they probably celebrate Christmas,

0:16:31.759,0:16:38.399
and they do believe in some sort of god and maybe an afterlife

0:16:38.399,0:16:44.639
but they are not that much connected to the Catholicism itself and they don't

0:16:44.639,0:16:50.800
feel connected to the church. In fact recently the paedophilia

0:16:50.800,0:16:57.839
topic arose finally after so many years of being covered.

0:16:57.839,0:17:02.399
This huge scandal really changed the way the Polish people perceive the Catholic

0:17:02.399,0:17:06.559
church today.
So yes definitely from the side of the

0:17:06.559,0:17:10.400
Government,
you can feel that, of course they are

0:17:10.400,0:17:15.280
very conservative

and very religious and the way they say

0:17:15.280,0:17:19.360

things . Well I really don't watch the public TV

0:17:19.360,0:17:26.319

anymore because I can't stand it. But luckily the society, it's changing for

0:17:26.319,0:17:30.960

the better.

Let us move on to another problematic

0:17:30.960,0:17:33.840

issue in Poland at the moment which is the position of

0:17:33.840,0:17:39.919

LGBT people and others. What's their situation is it?

0:17:39.919,0:17:44.960

Because recently there have been some cities in Poland isn't there which have

0:17:44.960,0:17:50.320

proclaimed that they're LGBT free. (KB): Yes well precisely they proclaim

0:17:50.320,0:17:55.760

that they are free of LGBT ideology.

0:17:55.760,0:18:02.000

I know it's still so bad but it there is a small difference

0:18:02.000,0:18:05.120

between that because when you hear LGBT free

0:18:05.120,0:18:08.799

you have immediately, or at least I have this association that,

0:18:08.799,0:18:11.919

you have these signs in the restaurant

that

0:18:11.919,0:18:15.120

LGBT people cannot enter and stuff like that.

0:18:15.120,0:18:21.360

Basically the battle here is about sexual education in schools and

0:18:21.360,0:18:28.799

any presence of LGBT associations or NGOs that fight for LGBT rights,

0:18:28.799,0:18:35.200

that any presence of them would be not allowed in schools. So it's mostly

0:18:35.200,0:18:40.000

about education. The Catholic church has some power of

0:18:40.000,0:18:43.679

education in Poland. We have the Catholic religion

0:18:43.679,0:18:48.080

classes at schools. (EP): Do you have Catholic religion classes at all schools

0:18:48.080,0:18:52.160

in Poland?

(KB):Yes at all public schools we have

0:18:52.160,0:18:56.559

Catholic religion.

There is an option for other

0:18:56.559,0:18:59.360

religion classes as well, in case there is a

0:18:59.360,0:19:04.559

minority

that would request such lessons. So

0:19:04.559,0:19:08.480

there are some regions in Poland

where you have other religions

0:19:08.480,0:19:12.160

taught at schools as well. (EP): What would the major other ones be? (KB): Well other versions

0:19:12.160,0:19:17.120

of Christianity, so the Orthodox Christianity and the

0:19:17.120,0:19:20.640

Protestant Christianity. I'm not sure if there is

0:19:20.640,0:19:25.840

if there are any lessons of Judaism. (EP): In these schools where there is Catholic

0:19:25.840,0:19:31.120

religion taught is it taught that being LGBT is wrong?

0:19:31.120,0:19:35.760

(KB): Definitely yes, so that's the problem that actually according to conquer that

0:19:35.760,0:19:40.240

we need to have these Catholic religion classes at schools.

0:19:40.240,0:19:46.080

They are optional so the the pupils don't have to participate in

0:19:46.080,0:19:50.000

them, but there has always been a huge social pressure

0:19:50.000,0:19:54.320

to participate. And this is one of the things that we have been fighting, the

0:19:54.320,0:19:59.679

Polish Rationalist Association. So,

0:19:59.679,0:20:05.280

for example we opposed this habit that was there - that people who

0:20:05.280,0:20:08.799

didn't want to send their children to these classes would actually

0:20:08.799,0:20:13.280

have to opt out from religion. So we pointed out that you

0:20:13.280,0:20:17.200

need to opt IN if this is an optional subject

0:20:17.200,0:20:21.679

and not that it looks as if it's mandatory by the fact that they

0:20:21.679,0:20:25.360

subscribe your child automatically and you need to opt out. So

0:20:25.360,0:20:29.360

this has changed for the better (EP): And you managed to get it to be a proper

0:20:29.360,0:20:33.600

opt-in rather than opt-out. (KB):Yes but there are still probably some

0:20:33.600,0:20:37.600

schools where it doesn't work as it should

0:20:37.600,0:20:41.760

but in majority of schools it's changed in the last decade. There

0:20:41.760,0:20:46.480

has been a huge progress, also the classes of ethics has

0:20:46.480,0:20:52.799

been introduced as an alternative. But still the problem is that the

0:20:52.799,0:20:57.280

religion classes,
the subjects which are taught, are

0:20:57.280,0:21:03.120

completely decided by the Church.
The State or the Ministry of Education

0:21:03.120,0:21:06.159

or the
School principal have absolutely nothing

0:21:06.159,0:21:10.720

to say
about what's taught in these classes. At

0:21:10.720,0:21:15.280

the same time it's the State that's
paying the wages of these teachers.

0:21:15.280,0:21:21.360

But they are appointed by Bishops and
and the School Principal cannot even

0:21:21.360,0:21:25.280

fire them if they misbehave.
The Principal would need to ask the

0:21:25.280,0:21:28.720

Bishop to replace that teacher with
another teacher.

0:21:28.720,0:21:32.080

So this is really bad and yes there have
been incidents...

0:21:32.080,0:21:37.120

well in general the Catholic church
teaches of course that sex before

0:21:37.120,0:21:41.360

marriage is a sin,
that homosexuality is a sin, that

0:21:41.360,0:21:45.919

abortion is a sin,
that masturbation is a sin. So these are

0:21:45.919,0:21:49.600

the
standard topics. Now of course

0:21:49.600,0:21:54.240

different priests would teach about this
in different ways, There are some that

0:21:54.240,0:21:58.320

are more tolerant
so they wouldn't, well they they wouldn't

0:21:58.320,0:22:02.320

even discuss it too much with children,
they would move on to other topics.

0:22:02.320,0:22:09.840

But there are some who definitely
use hate speech in these classes.

0:22:09.840,0:22:13.600

There have been some instances also
of anti-semitism

0:22:13.600,0:22:18.240

that was taught in these classes. And
these cases were reported by the parents

0:22:18.240,0:22:23.039

who were concerned,
even religious parents. Yes we have a lot

0:22:23.039,0:22:27.919

of religious people
who still would prefer that the society

0:22:27.919,0:22:32.720

is tolerant.
So there is a huge public debate

0:22:32.720,0:22:36.240

about this. (EP): Would you say in Poland in
general

0:22:36.240,0:22:40.080

there is tolerance of LGBT people in
most parts of

0:22:40.080,0:22:43.440
the country or would you say that it's a mixture of some

0:22:43.440,0:22:50.480
intolerance? (KB): I wouldn't go that far to say that we as a society in general

0:22:50.480,0:22:55.600
are very tolerant in this regard. I can say that it has

0:22:55.600,0:23:02.480
changed a lot in the last 20 years. That the 21st century marks for me

0:23:02.480,0:23:08.080
a huge progress and ever since we joined the European Union it has changed

0:23:08.080,0:23:11.600
definitely for the better. And the fact that young people are

0:23:11.600,0:23:15.280
exposed to values that come from other European

0:23:15.280,0:23:19.760
countries is very important. So among young people

0:23:19.760,0:23:27.039
you definitely see a big tolerance but in other generations? Well it

0:23:27.039,0:23:31.200
depends. it also actually varies regarding the

0:23:31.200,0:23:34.480
regions in Poland. So there are some regions which

0:23:34.480,0:23:38.080
are in general more conservative and more religious. And yes

0:23:38.080,0:23:43.039
i have to add regarding these LGBT ideology free zones

0:23:43.039,0:23:47.440
that even though it focuses , this Bill focuses on

0:23:47.440,0:23:50.960
education at schools that they don't want

0:23:50.960,0:23:57.039
any thing related to sexual orientation or gender to be

0:23:57.039,0:24:00.080
taught at schools. They would prefer to keep them

0:24:00.080,0:24:03.600
the Catholic narrative. There is a potential in these

0:24:03.600,0:24:07.600
regulations that it could change for more discrimination.

0:24:07.600,0:24:11.120
It actually varies also from place to place the exact

0:24:11.120,0:24:17.840
text that was approved by the Council. So in some of them you could understand

0:24:17.840,0:24:23.760
that the LGBT associations will not be given any

0:24:23.760,0:24:28.480
funding, that they cannot apply for grants or

0:24:28.480,0:24:32.000
even it might mean that they will not be able to do

0:24:32.000,0:24:38.000
equality marches
or other public organised

0:24:38.000,0:24:42.320
demonstrations. (EP):
When was latest legislation introduced?

0:24:42.320,0:24:44.960
(KB): Well it
started at the end of last year and

0:24:44.960,0:24:50.400
mainly it's this calendar year.
Some local councils,

0:24:50.400,0:24:57.120
mostly in small towns, have approved such
pieces of legislation for their local

0:24:57.120,0:25:00.000
structures. (EP):
I see, so the idea is basically to try

0:25:00.000,0:25:04.720
and shut down
LGBT rights groups and prevent them from..
(KB):Yes

0:25:04.720,0:25:10.159
however you can also see how this
has actually encouraged supporters of

0:25:10.159,0:25:14.640
tolerance to speak against
the Government, to speak against these

0:25:14.640,0:25:19.760
local councils,
to demonstrate for LGBT rights

0:25:19.760,0:25:24.960
and currently I know that the left-wing
party which is in the Parliament

0:25:24.960,0:25:31.120
is preparing another Bill
project for civil unions. It will be

0:25:31.120,0:25:35.520
the ninth time that this topic is raised
in the parliament. (EP):

0:25:35.520,0:25:38.559
Do you think it's likely
that this Bill will go through this time

0:25:38.559,0:25:42.159
given that the right-wing parties, the
united right are currently in power?

0:25:42.159,0:25:48.320
(KB): I don't think so but
it's very important actually to see how

0:25:48.320,0:25:52.400
other people will vote.
Because you see the problem is that when

0:25:52.400,0:25:57.120
the Civic Platform was in power,
there were also projects of the

0:25:57.120,0:26:01.279
civil union
legalisation at that time

0:26:01.279,0:26:06.559
and they voted against it.
Most of the members of the Parliament

0:26:06.559,0:26:09.679
from the Civic Platform
voted against it because they were also

0:26:09.679,0:26:14.480
very conservative and religious. (EP):
And just as the Civic Platform was the

0:26:14.480,0:26:17.360
coalition of
more sort of centrist parties that was

0:26:17.360,0:26:20.880
in power before. (KB):
Yes but they were very conservative;

0:26:20.880,0:26:23.440
this is something we forget because they have changed

0:26:23.440,0:26:27.440
now as an opposition to Law and Justice,

0:26:27.440,0:26:31.600
they have become much more tolerant much more progressive.

0:26:31.600,0:26:35.440
(EP): What you're saying is that actually the the greater conservatism

0:26:35.440,0:26:38.720
of the Law and Justice Party has actually pushed

0:26:38.720,0:26:42.720
the Civic Platform the other way? (KB):Yes that's definitely what happened

0:26:42.720,0:26:47.760
and because see now in this presidential elections we had

0:26:47.760,0:26:51.679
the candidate from the Civic Platform Rafael Chazkovsky,

0:26:51.679,0:26:55.600
whose one of the main points in the agenda was the fight for the

0:26:55.600,0:27:01.279
LGBT rights, and the second one was the reproduction rights of women. He didn't

0:27:01.279,0:27:05.200
have a long agenda for the elections. These were the two main topics for him

0:27:05.200,0:27:09.120
and the general tolerance. And he was the second candidate;

0:27:09.120,0:27:12.720
he was the one who in the second round was against

0:27:12.720,0:27:16.880
Andrei Duda and he received around 49% of

0:27:16.880,0:27:22.960
votes. So yes Andrei Duda was re-elected but if you look at the numbers the

0:27:22.960,0:27:26.880
two candidates were so close to each other. So it actually shows

0:27:26.880,0:27:34.240
that in a way the conservatism of Law and Justice is somehow motivating

0:27:34.240,0:27:38.399
other people to become more progressive and more tolerant. I really see this

0:27:38.399,0:27:41.440
process and this process gives me hope. Although

0:27:41.440,0:27:44.559
at the same time I'm still a bit frightened

0:27:44.559,0:27:48.080
about what the Law and Justice MAY do because what they did with the

0:27:48.080,0:27:54.559
judiciary system is quite concerning and if they continue doing similar

0:27:54.559,0:27:58.159
things, this could be potentially dangerous. But

0:27:58.159,0:28:03.279
the change in the society, I see it for the better really.

0:28:03.279,0:28:06.880

(EP): Well that's very encouraging. What do you think are going to be the main

0:28:06.880,0:28:10.960

challenges for your organisation, the Polish Rationalist Association

0:28:10.960,0:28:14.559

during the rest of the current Government's

0:28:14.559,0:28:18.640

term and the rest of Andrei Duda's term in office?

0:28:18.640,0:28:23.039

(KB): Well it's very hard to say because it's hard to predict with

0:28:23.039,0:28:28.559

what they would do . And also it's very hard to say whether there

0:28:28.559,0:28:32.640

will be some new Bill projects that come from this

0:28:32.640,0:28:36.559

very right-wing religious organisations,

0:28:36.559,0:28:41.039

like Ordo Iuris, so of course any initiative from their side

0:28:41.039,0:28:44.159

would be a huge concern for us. (EP): Is there anything

0:28:44.159,0:28:47.679

that do you think they might be likely to do, or that they've been muttering that

0:28:47.679,0:28:50.799

they might

introduce that you particularly fear. (KB): The

0:28:50.799,0:28:55.760

most endangered group might be the LGBT. So,

0:28:55.760,0:29:02.159

we'll see how this whole situation evolves. Because if for example they

0:29:02.159,0:29:07.440

are not allowed to demonstrate anymore, that's already a huge thing. Because

0:29:07.440,0:29:12.640

regarding their presence at schools to be honest, it wasn't even there almost

0:29:12.640,0:29:16.720

in most of the schools they were not allowed before.

0:29:16.720,0:29:21.200

As same as any civil society organisations actually were not very

0:29:21.200,0:29:25.440

much present at Polish schools. So in fact

0:29:25.440,0:29:28.559

there are some people who say that the initiative

0:29:28.559,0:29:33.120

to actually invite them to some of the public schools

0:29:33.120,0:29:37.039

to give some lessons about tolerance that was something that motivated

0:29:37.039,0:29:40.640

the religious organisations to create this idea of

0:29:40.640,0:29:46.559

LGBT ideology-free zones. (EP): But that's

for you that's not the most important

0:29:46.559,0:29:49.679

problem

is it, I mean it's more in society

0:29:49.679,0:29:54.159

than the

suppression of LGBT voices. Is that right?

0:29:54.159,0:29:57.200

(KB): Yes that's correct but we we are concerned

0:29:57.200,0:30:03.760

with this of course. So if they are suppressed even more we will

0:30:03.760,0:30:07.120

definitely

speak about. In the future, well we will definitely

0:30:07.120,0:30:11.520

continue

what we are doing right now so we focus

0:30:11.520,0:30:16.559

a lot on education.

We organise conferences,

0:30:16.559,0:30:20.640

we organise free lectures, open debates

0:30:20.640,0:30:28.399

about science, about social issues, we organise big festival Darwin Days

0:30:28.399,0:30:33.279

along with universities . We try to encourage a dialogue -

0:30:33.279,0:30:37.679

this is something that's missing completely now in Poland.

0:30:37.679,0:30:40.960

(EP): But how far are your discussion forums, your conferences, your

0:30:40.960,0:30:45.360

your Darwin Days and interactions with the universities, what success

0:30:45.360,0:30:49.600

are you having so far? (KB):

Well the Darwin Days are very popular

0:30:49.600,0:30:52.559

and this is the only such initiative in Poland.

0:30:52.559,0:30:56.240

And we have hundreds of people who come to the lectures

0:30:56.240,0:31:01.519

and we have debates and we have videos that are available then

0:31:01.519,0:31:07.440

for people. And it is a huge impact.

So we are trying to create space

0:31:07.440,0:31:11.279

basically for

free thinking, for dialogue. This is

0:31:11.279,0:31:16.399

what we are trying to show -

tolerance. We try to show what science

0:31:16.399,0:31:19.760

says

on several topics. In the past we

0:31:19.760,0:31:23.120

fought a lot with the privileges of the Church and especially

0:31:23.120,0:31:29.760

we tried to diminish this rule

of the religious classes. So we fought

0:31:29.760,0:31:34.080

for the ethics class to be introduced. We were not the only organisation of course

0:31:34.080,0:31:38.720

that fought for it so it's not just our credit but

0:31:38.720,0:31:42.399

we are very happy that this actually was accomplished.

0:31:42.399,0:31:47.200

(EP): That's great you seem to be having quite a lot of success so far

0:31:47.200,0:31:51.039

which is very encouraging. Just just one final question

0:31:51.039,0:31:55.200

Kaya. What do you think secularist organisations in different countries,

0:31:55.200,0:31:59.039

what do you think such organisations can learn from each other?

0:31:59.039,0:32:05.840

(KB): Well I think we can learn a lot. First of all that secularism has so many

0:32:05.840,0:32:09.519

different faces in in different countries.

0:32:09.519,0:32:16.080

And some challenges are similar so we can see how these were dealt with

0:32:16.080,0:32:19.600

in the past in other countries by other organisations.

0:32:19.600,0:32:26.480

We can share also our experience. Secularism is something that's

0:32:26.480,0:32:31.519

a very basic thing for the society to function. If we have multicultural

0:32:31.519,0:32:35.919

society, secularism is the only guarantee for

0:32:35.919,0:32:38.960

tolerance, to ensure that the rights of all people

0:32:38.960,0:32:42.960

are in place. I think that the more we learn from

0:32:42.960,0:32:46.720

other people the better we can make our societies so

0:32:46.720,0:32:49.600

I definitely look forward to further

0:32:49.600,0:32:54.720

cooperation. (EP): Kaya Bryx, thank you very much.

0:32:54.840,0:32:57.840

(KB): Thank you.

0:33:01.279,0:33:05.919

(EP): I'm joined now by Aleksandra Myslek (AM). Aleksandra has been a member of the NSS

0:33:05.919,0:33:09.760

Council since 2019. She's currently a fellow at Trinity Love

0:33:09.760,0:33:12.880

and specialising in piano accompaniment. She also works

0:33:12.880,0:33:16.399

as a school teacher at primary and secondary school

0:33:16.399,0:33:21.039

level. Aleks, first of all ,the music you were playing today this was

0:33:21.039,0:33:24.080

for the recording this was Frederick Chopin's Ballad No. 4

0:33:24.080,0:33:29.120

in F minor Opus 52. Why did you choose this piece of music?

0:33:29.120,0:33:32.240

(AM): Well hello first of all. I chose this piece of music

0:33:32.240,0:33:35.519

simply because it was with me for a very long time.

0:33:35.519,0:33:40.799

I learned it when i was quite young and it was actually at the moment when I was

0:33:40.799,0:33:44.720

changing a little bit my own beliefs and it stayed with me

0:33:44.720,0:33:49.200

until now. And the piece of course is by a Polish composer Chopin

0:33:49.200,0:33:54.640

which you know gives a little bit of the I guess patriotism in a good sense of

0:33:54.640,0:33:57.679

the word to the picture. (EP): We could talk about this for a long time

0:33:57.679,0:34:01.360

but let's just move on to the National Secular Society

0:34:01.360,0:34:07.600

issues. Now you have recently been involved with Keith Porteous Wood in

0:34:07.600,0:34:12.800

drafting an NSS submission to the UN, in particular to the UN Convention on

0:34:12.800,0:34:16.639

the Rights of the Child, which was an alternative report on

0:34:16.639,0:34:19.919

Poland. What exactly were you and Keith hoping

0:34:19.919,0:34:25.040

to achieve by this? (AM): I was simply helping Keith with all the

0:34:25.040,0:34:28.079

resources and translation, because we were under

0:34:28.079,0:34:33.839

the impression that a lot of things happening in Poland or the detail

0:34:33.839,0:34:39.679

behind certain issues might not reach the Convention simply because of the

0:34:39.679,0:34:43.280

language. So we want the Convention to be more

0:34:43.280,0:34:48.879

aware of the problem. so they can later in turn you know ask Poland to

0:34:48.879,0:34:52.879

clarify certain things or to improve certain things. What I was also doing I

0:34:52.879,0:34:56.560

was trying to contact lots of organisations and

0:34:56.560,0:35:00.800

individuals in Poland who are simply unaware of the

0:35:00.800,0:35:05.119

possibility to submit
certain reports or you know simply

0:35:05.119,0:35:09.119
their views on things
again because of language issues or

0:35:09.119,0:35:13.440
you know perhaps education issues
and I encouraged other organisations to

0:35:13.440,0:35:17.280
write to the Convention
simply so they have a very full picture

0:35:17.280,0:35:21.680
and they can know what's happening and
in a very practical efficient manner ask

0:35:21.680,0:35:26.000
Poland to
fix what needs to be fixed . (EP): Now I was

0:35:26.000,0:35:29.680
talking to
Kaya just now about some of the issues

0:35:29.680,0:35:33.119
facing Poland under the government of

0:35:33.119,0:35:38.160
the Law and Justice Party and
President Duda and the NSS submission

0:35:38.160,0:35:41.280
covered quite a lot of those issues. In
particular you were focusing

0:35:41.280,0:35:45.359
on the issue of education of children
specifically with

0:35:45.359,0:35:50.160
regard to the provision of LGBT teaching
and then Keith was focusing on issues of

0:35:50.160,0:35:54.480
child abuse in the Catholic church. So

what were your particular

0:35:54.480,0:35:57.599
points that you were trying to make in
this document?

0:35:57.599,0:36:00.800
(AM): Well the main point that I was trying to
make

0:36:00.800,0:36:07.599
is that the Catholic church went
too far with influencing education.

0:36:07.599,0:36:12.320
And of course the sex education is you
know most influenced by it simply

0:36:12.320,0:36:15.200
because of the
set of values that the Catholic church

0:36:15.200,0:36:20.400
is trying to push.
And my big belief is that you know that

0:36:20.400,0:36:24.640
very early education is extremely
important, simply to develop

0:36:24.640,0:36:28.160
certain tolerance or certain
open-mindedness,

0:36:28.160,0:36:32.960
and also you know in children but
also to give them a sense of their own

0:36:32.960,0:36:39.040
rights. And my unfortunate,
my view is that the church is attempting

0:36:39.040,0:36:41.839
to deaden
and to somehow mute this part of

0:36:41.839,0:36:46.240
education and to influence it

too much. Which you know we wouldn't let

0:36:46.240,0:36:50.079

happen in any other subjects you would hope. (EP): Well what in

0:36:50.079,0:36:55.599

particular is the church doing? (AM): So they basically push

0:36:55.599,0:37:01.920

the ideology of what is wrong and what is right ignoring the

0:37:01.920,0:37:06.960

specialists and ignoring the scientific or psychological advice

0:37:06.960,0:37:10.240

that we, well should be following really in schools.

0:37:10.240,0:37:13.520

(EP): In particular they avoid teaching about LGBT

0:37:13.520,0:37:19.359

topics? (AM): Oh exactly I mean you know if you are lucky you will simply have

0:37:19.359,0:37:22.000

nothing about the LGBT which is already bad

0:37:22.000,0:37:26.960

enough because you can't just exclude children from knowing things about

0:37:26.960,0:37:30.640

themselves even. That's already bad but what they also do,

0:37:30.640,0:37:35.280

or at least they allow it which is bad enough, they often say

0:37:35.280,0:37:40.640

you know that the LGBT

community, or ideology as they call it,

0:37:40.640,0:37:44.160

should be cured and it's evil and of course

0:37:44.160,0:37:48.079

children's minds are really easily influenced and that causes a huge

0:37:48.079,0:37:52.079

mental health crisis among young people. (EP): Is this something that

0:37:52.079,0:37:56.079

is happening in Poland now that you that Poland is really seeing children

0:37:56.079,0:37:58.480

who've been influenced in this way by the Catholic church

0:37:58.480,0:38:05.440

develop and have problems. (AM): Yes absolutely; sex education in itself doesn't actually

0:38:05.440,0:38:10.720

exist what we've got is so-called Education and Family Life

0:38:10.720,0:38:14.480

and that gives you a clue what the church is trying to do

0:38:14.480,0:38:18.800

or the Government if you like at the moment. Because the family by Polish

0:38:18.800,0:38:23.920

Catholic standards is a man and a woman and that's it. So if you've got it,

0:38:23.920,0:38:27.200

well the marriage of a man and a woman of course. So if

0:38:27.200,0:38:30.800

you've got a subject
in schools that is called Education in

0:38:30.800,0:38:35.200
Family Life it
automatically excludes the LGBT

0:38:35.200,0:38:39.599
community.
(EP): Now Kaya was altogether quite positive i

0:38:39.599,0:38:43.280
think overall about the future of Poland
and she said that there was quite a lot

0:38:43.280,0:38:47.520
of resistance to the conservatism
being pushed by the current government

0:38:47.520,0:38:51.760
and the catholic church.
Would you agree with that? (AM): There is a
lot

0:38:51.760,0:38:56.160
of resistance
and some institutions work extremely

0:38:56.160,0:39:00.160
well in Poland. And
there is a resistance especially from

0:39:00.160,0:39:04.560
big cities
and from the legal community

0:39:04.560,0:39:10.880
and from young people as well. And we
hope that the more extreme behaviour we

0:39:10.880,0:39:14.800
see
from religious extremists really and

0:39:14.800,0:39:20.480
right-wing politicians as well, the more
kind of a liberal or centre-ground

0:39:20.480,0:39:26.320
person will be willing to protest.
(EP): Finally Aleks did you have any other

0:39:26.320,0:39:32.079
comments or reflections on
what Kaya was saying? (AM): Well Kaya
touched

0:39:32.079,0:39:36.240
on
a very many important issues but

0:39:36.240,0:39:41.359
she might have also
noticed that you know in Poland we've

0:39:41.359,0:39:46.640
got fantastic
free Press still. We've got

0:39:46.640,0:39:49.680
our Ombudsman who is a bit of a hero at
the moment

0:39:49.680,0:39:55.359
for example being able to sue
some of the municipalities that were

0:39:55.359,0:40:00.640
declared LGBT-free zones
and winning. (EP): So what what exactly is his

0:40:00.640,0:40:04.640
role? (AM):
Well he is the Human Rights Ombudsman

0:40:04.640,0:40:08.960
simply
and he is a very liberal person

0:40:08.960,0:40:13.680
he's a Professor of law and at the
moment he is one of the last

0:40:13.680,0:40:17.440
sort of people standing in in this kind
of public

0:40:17.440,0:40:23.520

world that is very very strongly against the conservative Catholic ideology and

0:40:23.520,0:40:26.880

he apart from being a fantastic lawyer and

0:40:26.880,0:40:30.319

quite a powerful person he also organises you know educational

0:40:30.319,0:40:35.839

events, he cooperates with universities and he's quite bold essentially in his

0:40:35.839,0:40:38.640

movements against, well I don't want to say conservative

0:40:38.640,0:40:41.200

government I guess because they have to offend somebody

0:40:41.200,0:40:44.880

but the government in Poland at the moment . (EP): Right

0:40:44.880,0:40:51.599

and what's his name? (AM): Adam Bodnar. (EP): And just looking forward

0:40:51.599,0:40:55.359

Aleks from your point of view, what are the next steps of the NSS going to

0:40:55.359,0:41:00.880

be in regard to Poland? (AM): We will see because unfortunately

0:41:00.880,0:41:05.280

what happens in Poland at the moment is quite similar to what happens in other

0:41:05.280,0:41:07.599

countries that

are swallowed by the nationalist

0:41:07.599,0:41:11.040

ideology and that is fighting against the liberal

0:41:11.040,0:41:14.720

values, the West for example. So you will be pleased to know

0:41:14.720,0:41:18.960

that Britain or even the conservative British government is called Marxist in

0:41:18.960,0:41:25.119

Poland. (EP): But that sounds quite crazy from the British person .. (AM):Yes

0:41:25.119,0:41:29.520

exactly so in a way you know with the NSS we should probably lend knowledge

0:41:29.520,0:41:32.560

if anything to Polish organisations that work in the same

0:41:32.560,0:41:35.839

vein and in you know we try to achieve the same things but

0:41:35.839,0:41:39.359

we can't hope that the NSS itself can be somehow

0:41:39.359,0:41:44.319

influential in Poland because by definition it is the liberal western 'evil'

0:41:44.319,0:41:50.079

but I guess the cooperation should be and could be perhaps enhanced so the

0:41:50.079,0:41:53.760

Polish organisations can learn from our knowledge here. (EP): Aleksander

0:41:53.760,0:42:03.839

Myslek thank you very much. (AM):
Thank you very much.

0:42:06.000,0:42:09.280
(EP): This episode was produced by the
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0:42:09.280,0:42:13.359
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